

1 GOVERNOR'S COMMITTEE ON EMPLOYMENT AND REHABILITATION
2 OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES
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6 Old St. Joseph's Church
7 Nome, Alaska
8

9 Wednesday, June 20, 2007
10

1 PUBLIC TESTIMONY

2 MS. BISBEE: Well, welcome to the public
3 testimony of the quarterly meeting of the Governor's
4 Committee on Employment and Rehabilitation of People
5 with Disabilities.

6 I'm not going to give a big, long spiel
7 or introduce anybody because we've basically gone
8 through the introductions and we don't have too many
9 people here right now. So Ruth Johnson, would you
10 like to testify.

11 MS. JOHNSON: Yes. I was born and
12 raised here in Nome, Alaska. I came back to Nome and
13 I was diagnosed with MS the year before -- the year
14 after Adak came on line, and Nome is not real

15 accessible as far as that.

16 As my MS has progressed I've gotten less
17 ambulatory. For four years I lived in Kiana, and I
18 did all the little airplanes, and it was interesting.
19 And before, as I was leaving in '96, it was like I
20 would go on the planes but I would have to go
21 backwards because the motion that I needed to do
22 didn't work forwards. So I'd step on the steps and go
23 backwards, and little places I couldn't bend to get in
24 them.

25 So I've had some real experiences with

1 traveling in the bush. And there is nothing
2 accessible, you can forget it. What Sara Neubauer
3 talked about today is the truth. They pour you on the
4 plane, they pour you off the plane.

5 And then Audrey talked about the
6 universal design for homes. Please do it, because
7 living in Kiana, my boyfriend had to be medevac'd a
8 couple times. They picked him up and packed him down
9 to the bottom of the stairs, put him on the gurney,
10 put him on the sled, took him to the medevac plane.
11 They would have had to roll me out the door, drag me
12 down to the bottom of the steps and put me on a gurney
13 because I couldn't walk.

14 We just need a different way to

15 function. And I know the rest of the world just
16 doesn't even think about it because we're mandated by
17 the government to be accessible. Well, Nome is
18 getting Front Street paved from Bering east to M
19 Street, and they are putting new sidewalks, and I'm
20 going, oh, it's going to be so nice. I have a bump
21 that is high to drive over where the cement slabs have
22 gone. They pulled all the street lights out on
23 Bering, the street that runs out here.

24 After I moved back to Nome it took the
25 State along time to finally get a recycling pavement

1 machine and patch it with pavement, otherwise I would
2 get stuck in it periodically. But I always have
3 wonderful help here in Nome from everybody. They pick
4 me up when I fall in mud puddles and go on my face on
5 the ramp, and they get me unstuck when I find soft
6 spots on the road. But there are places I would like
7 to go and I can't, and there is a ramp there but I
8 can't get on the ramps. And one is the Extension
9 Office, and I think it's the University of Alaska that
10 has the building. And getting into the campus here, I
11 can get in the main building, there is a nice ramp,
12 but every door has an Arctic entry, and it's a bump,
13 and you have to drive over it, and so someone in a
14 manual wheelchair cannot.

15 So mobility to go get a job if you're in
16 a wheelchair is very limited. And other than me in an

17 electric wheelchair I don't think there is anybody
18 else in Nome. And the people that are in regular
19 standard wheelchairs are usually the elders and they
20 are pushed and go through the adult day-care program
21 and XYZ, which is the senior program here, and so they
22 have help.

23 But there is no independence. They
24 can't go out the door and go somewhere. There isn't
25 anywhere to go. And they redid sidewalks on Stedman

1 when they redid it. Well, those sidewalks are very
2 interesting now, so I don't go on them because I don't
3 want to fall off of them.

4 So living in the Arctic is definitely
5 different. So I appreciate any support all of you can
6 give to continue making the world accessible. And
7 what happens in the villages -- and living in Kiana, I
8 was ambulatory until I left, I walked. As I started
9 getting worse I was in the sled pulled by the
10 snowmachine and I had to sit on like a cooler because
11 I didn't -- I couldn't get up anymore. That's what my
12 MS did, it took away that ability.

13 So I know what people live with, and
14 they do put them on sleds and they do take them to the
15 airplanes. And I did never have to get medevac'd, and
16 I'm glad I never had to, because it's got to be a

18 Pam has traveled to Delta and worked with us, and Pam
19 set up a work evaluation program for my husband. She
20 worked with a Ft. Greeley employer, she worked through
21 a lot of road blocks of legal union issues, safety
22 issues concerning my husband.

23 He has physical and short-term memory
24 loss problems. Anyway, through Pam's efforts they
25 reached an agreement, and my husband went to work last

1 November on a work evaluation program and did well.
2 And the employer offered him a part-time permanent
3 position this past April.

4 And without the services of DVR and our
5 counselor, this would never have been possible on our
6 own. We would have never got, you know, to square
7 one. And Pam set up -- she worked with the employer
8 to set up a work schedule that accommodated all his
9 limitations, got him a job coach, you know, worked
10 through all the issues that myself, who works full
11 time, wouldn't have been able to do for my husband.
12 And so the services that DVR provides in Delta
13 Junction and in rural Alaska, we just don't have other
14 opportunities.

15 And the program also makes us aware of
16 what the State of Alaska has for people with
17 disabilities that we might not know until we're in
18 that situation, where all the sudden we or someone in

19 our family is disabled. And so I just want to give a
20 thank you to the program and the State for having this
21 kind of thing and this opportunity for disabled
22 people.

23 MS. BISBEE: Thank you, Linda.

24 MS. ELSTAD: Thank you so much. This is
25 the Governor's Committee on Employment and

1 Rehabilitation of People with Disabilities, we're
2 taking public comment. Would you like to make a
3 public comment.

4 MS. BLAJESKI: I just made it.

5 MS. ELSTAD: That was you. Is there
6 anybody else on line that would like to testify today?

7 MS. EHSOGAEK: Yes.

8 MS. ELSTAD: Could I have your name?

9 MS. EHSOGAEK: Nancy Ehsogaek from
10 Barrow.

11 MS. ELSTAD: Nancy, what's your last
12 name? Nancy, what's your last name and spell that for
13 me, please.

14 MS. EHSOGAEK: E-h-s-o-g-a-e-k.

15 MS. ELSTAD: Nancy, if you would like to
16 go ahead and testify, please.

17 MS. EHSOGAEK: Yes. I just want to
18 thank you very much for helping me. I've been having
19 glaucoma and cataracts and going back and forth to the

20 Native hospitals since '91, and '97 when I was
21 diagnosed, and just didn't -- I've been just going and
22 back and forth, back and forth, and nothing resolved.

23 And finally I went to DVR, and how
24 awesome. They helped me out as much as the Native
25 hospitals didn't. Thank you very much for bringing me

1 up here to the Center For Blind, and that's all I
2 would need to know. And I support Pam, Valerie and
3 people over at the Center For Blind. Thank you.

4 MS. ELSTAD: Thank you. Is there
5 anybody else on line that would like to testify today?

6 MS. BISBEE: Okay. We can wait until
7 somebody gets on line. Let's take a break.

8 (Break)

9 MS. ELSTAD: Okay, we have Bob Curtis on
10 the line. Bob?

11 MR. CURTIS: First of all, I just wanted
12 to commend the Governor's Committee on Employment and
13 Rehabilitation of People with Disabilities. What a
14 mouthful.

15 And secondly, I just called in so this
16 is very timely. I wanted to indicate I serve in the
17 capacity of juvenile safety action counselor. My
18 office here is with the Alaska Court System, and I
19 deal primarily with minor consuming adolescents.

20 As a consequence to my position I have
21 been very happy to interface also with the Vocational

22 Rehabilitation program here in this area. I just
23 wanted to really commend the efforts that this program
24 has -- how this has worked in our area. We make every
25 effort to try to interface with each other and do --

1 make collaborative efforts to see how we can really
2 maximize their efforts in assisting people with
3 disabilities.

4 I just wanted to really emphasize that
5 this is a very good and very viable program, and as we
6 proceed in our efforts, we are realizing some
7 unintended consequences.

8 You have to understand with our young
9 people here with the minor consumers, they come into
10 the office, oftentimes they are first time offenders,
11 others are repeat offenders, and we've had habitual
12 offenders. What we focus on is unintended
13 consequences. So with the assistance of Vocational
14 Rehabilitation program in partnering with them we have
15 realized some successes here. Let me give you some
16 ideas here.

17 Some of my offenders have gone on to the
18 school of avionics, and I'm proud of that. And we
19 have realized other successes such as some consumers
20 entering into the dental therapy program and other
21 work force type of programs, might it be training or
22 full-time employment status.

23 I just really wanted to commend the fine
24 program as to what this is, and I thought I'd put in
25 some words on that. And if you have any questions

1 regarding the aspects of this, I'd be willing to
2 answer, but otherwise I'm happy to be a part of this.
3 And I hope that we can continue with our efforts to
4 see what we could do to really try to maximize our
5 youth in particular, and also challenge ourselves as
6 to how we can best redirect their lives and make them
7 productive members of our community.

8 MS. ELSTAD: Thank you. Any questions?

9 MS. BISBEE: Questions for Bob.

10 MS. SIMPSON: Thank you, Bob.

11 MS. BISBEE: Thank you.

12 MR. CURTIS: Thanks, and I appreciate
13 the time and effort, and keep up the good work.

14 MS. ELSTAD: Thanks.

15 MS. BISBEE: Kathy Privratsky.

16 MS. PRIVRATSKY: I don't know what I'm
17 going to say.

18 I'm Kathy Privratsky, I'm the executive
19 director of ATLA, Assistive Technology of Alaska in
20 Anchorage. DVR is doing a great job. ATLA works very
21 closely with DVR.

22 There is one area that I want to
23 address. We've had a couple clients, seems like we

24 have a couple clients a year that come in that are
25 college graduates and they maybe have used assistive

1 technology in the past, they may have lost their job.
2 When they get ready to go to the assessment center
3 they go through a complete battery of assessments,
4 like psychological, they go through academic to an
5 extent that I think some of them are feeling like they
6 are worthless because, like, why are you putting me
7 through this entire assessment when I came in and I
8 want to get a job, but now you want to see if I'm,
9 like, a high school graduate. And --

10 MS. ELSTAD: Hi, we're taking public
11 comment right now, could you hold just a moment,
12 please.

13 SPEAKER: Yes, ma'am.

14 MS. PRIVRATSKY: And most of these
15 individuals also use assistive technology. So when
16 they get ready to do their assessment, sometimes the
17 assessment is done without their assistive technology
18 because they want to see how do they do without
19 technology. And that's silly. They use the
20 technology to get it to work in their jobs, and now
21 the assumption is, well, let's see how you do without
22 it because maybe you don't need it.

23 We see that as a big problem, and it
24 takes a long time for this assessment, and they are

25 coming in back to us really frustrated wanting to

1 know, gee, they don't agree with the technology, that
2 we'll have to get new technology, or I had to do the
3 assessment and I never had the opportunity to do the
4 best that I could.

5 If I'd been using voice recognition for
6 years, and now you say I have to take a handwriting
7 test and I have to take a spelling test and I have to
8 take a typing test, and I don't type, I use voice
9 recognition. It doesn't make sense.

10 So I don't know exactly what the policy
11 is when it comes to assessments, because I've been to
12 the assessment center a couple times. So I'd just
13 like to know kind of what's happening. Is this a
14 policy that everybody has to go through, that type
15 of -- the type of testing?

16 MS. O'CONNOR: That would be
17 inappropriate to tell a client that you have to go
18 through an assessment without the assistive technology
19 that has benefitted you or makes it that your testing
20 is most accurate, so it surprises me.

21 MS. PRIVRATSKY: It seems to me that
22 same thing. But, like I said, I would bet once a
23 quarter that we get that, someone coming in. And it
24 probably is also the people that we know, because
25 we've worked with them over a period of time. And so

1 it's like we try and advocate for them, but it's like
2 no, we go through the policy and complete battery of
3 tests.

4 MS. O'CONNOR: It might be a situation
5 where they are saying this person is not in plans so
6 we can't buy this and that because we want to do the
7 assessment phase, I'm thinking it's possibly that.

8 MS. STRATTON: But, but.

9 MS. O'CONNOR: But we can get assistive
10 technology.

11 MS. STRATTON: But during assessment
12 they are supposed to provide any assistive technology
13 they need.

14 MS. O'CONNOR: Maybe a newer counselor
15 would think we can't buy you things because you are
16 not in a plan yet.

17 MS. PRIVRATSKY: And I think it would be
18 a really great discussion to have. And we've tried to
19 have that discussion, but ATLA is at a situation where
20 we don't -- may not even know about somebody until
21 they come to us and say, guess what happened to me.
22 So that's probably a really frustration.

23 And the other one is sometimes, and my
24 background is augmentative communication, so working
25 with individuals that use communication devices, and a

1 number of these individuals have communication devices
2 which they don't use very well. And oftentimes the
3 device isn't part of the evaluation, or the assumption
4 is that they are not very bright if they are using the
5 device, that someone that uses a communication device
6 can have great skills. You don't know who the person
7 is.

8 So I think sometimes we assume,
9 especially with somebody that's non-speaking, that
10 they are not very smart. And a couple of the
11 individuals that I'm thinking of specifically also
12 have graduated from college and they can't get a job
13 because no one will give them that first interview.
14 And sometimes DVR is not making that first interview
15 easy because that first interview gets back to, let's
16 go through this whole assessment. And it's like, I
17 want a job, I graduated.

18 So I don't know if there is another
19 level of service that somebody can come into or
20 another level of assessment where you don't have to
21 start down here and work your way up, instead of,
22 let's start here, here are your skills and where can
23 you go from here. Thank you very much.

24 MS. BISBEE: Thank you, Ms. Privratsky.

25 MS. STRATTON: Thank you.

1 MS. ELSTAD: Hello, this is the

2 Governor's Committee on Employment and Rehabilitation
3 of People with Disabilities. We're taking public
4 comment. Is there anybody on line that would like to
5 testify?

6 MS. CRUISE: Yes.

7 MS. ELSTAD: What's your name, ma'am?

8 MS. CRUISE: Adrianna Cruise.

9 MS. ELSTAD: Thank you, Adrianna, and
10 we're ready to hear you.

11 MS. CRUISE: Well, DVR has helped me a
12 lot. They have always been there. My case worker,
13 she always has very good information when I ask. And
14 that is a good program that they have, so I'm very
15 pleased with them. Everybody is very helpful. Every
16 time I go to the office and any time I have a question
17 they have good answers. So it's a good input. If it
18 wasn't for DVR I don't know where I would be. So
19 anything else I should say?

20 MS. BISBEE: Any questions for Adrianna?

21 MS. SIMPSON: Adrianna, what community
22 are you from?

23 MS. CRUISE: I'm calling from Tok,
24 Alaska.

25 MS. SIMPSON: Thank you.

1 MS. BISBEE: Any other questions? Thank
2 you.

3 MS. O'CONNOR: Thank you.

4 MS. ELSTAD: Thank you, Adrianna.

5 MS. CRUISE: Okay.

6 MS. STRATTON: Is there anybody else on
7 line?

8 MS. BISBEE: Let's take a break.

9 (Break)

10 MS. ELSTAD: Good afternoon, this is
11 Governor's Committee on Employment and Rehabilitation
12 of People with Disabilities, we're take public
13 comment. Would anyone like to testify today?

14 MR. LEAD: Yeah, Alvin Lead.

15 MS. ELSTAD: Your name again?

16 MR. LEAD: Alvin Lead.

17 MS. ELSTAD: Okay, go ahead, ALVIN.

18 MR. LEAD: Yeah, I'm sorry I didn't call
19 in earlier, I didn't look at the times. My friend
20 told me that there was a conference going on there,
21 and I would like to make a comment on Fairbanks DVR
22 personnel there.

23 They have done a very good job on my
24 behalf to clients like me. And I'm disabled, five
25 years disabled, and just make a comment to DVR in

1 Fairbanks. They have done a good job. And also up in
2 North Slope Barrow, they have done an excellent job as
3 well on my behalf. And that was my comment.

4 MS. ELSTAD: Okay, well thank you,
5 Alvin. Where do you live?

6 MR. LEAD: I live in Atquasuk, the next
7 village to Barrow, probably 68 miles east of Barrow.

8 MS. BISBEE: Any questions for Alvin?
9 Thank you, Alvin.

10 MR. LEAD: All right, thank you.

11 MS. ELSTAD: This is the Governor's
12 Committee on Employment and Rehabilitation of People
13 with Disabilities. We're taking public comment. Is
14 there anyone on line that would like to comment?

15 MS. BISBEE: Okay, well I'd like to
16 thank everyone for their testimony. It's a little
17 after 5:00, so we'll close the meeting.

18 (Meeting adjourned)